

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

Robert McNair School

Elementary-Middle School 147

**218-01 116 Avenue
Queens
NY 11411**

Principal: Anne Cohen

Dates of review: January 20 - 21, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Linda Trifon

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Robert McNair School is an elementary/middle school with 912 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 91% Black, 4% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 94.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Compassion, commitment and dedication are the essence of the Ronald McNair School where the focused leadership has propelled it to become a vibrant community school. The principal strategically makes instructional and organizational decisions that are aligned to the school's goals and has been instrumental in creating a nurturing and supportive culture. Effective partnerships with outside organizations thrive in this school and gives support to students and families. Workshops, family nights, movie nights and other thematic events, foster parent involvement. The school makes efforts to encourage parents as well as to keep them abreast of their child's performance. A parent shared, "The admission ticket to these school events is the cover page of the ARIS parent link. The principal wants to make sure we are paying attention to our kids. I love the way this school thinks!"

The school has high expectations for attendance, behavior and academic performance providing incentives for students. Parents and teachers are pleased with the school's open door policy and appreciate they are part of the decision making process. The school's curriculum is aligned to State standards, but currently it is not rigorous or specific enough and sufficiently differentiated to consistently meet the needs of those students capable of higher performance. School leaders and faculty use a variety of tools to collect and analyze data on student learning outcomes. However, rigorous analysis of the learning needs of student subgroups is not fully embedded across the school. At this time, there are no transparent structures in place to measure and track the progress of all subgroups against formative assessments and interim benchmarks thus hindering the establishment of precise learning goals for identified students. Communication to students and families is inconsistent across the school and do not identify targeted next steps and precise feedback.

The school has assessed data that reveals that it is on track towards reaching its goals to improve instruction. Teachers and coaches meet in collaborative teams to analyze student work, co-plan, share best practices and engage in rich academic discourse with the aim of increasing the use of differentiation to accelerate student's progress. Supportive formal and informal evaluations and conversations with teachers and coaches promote the continuous monitoring and revision of classroom practices and planned professional development. "Sometimes we are on the phone until two o'clock in the morning talking about strategies," exclaimed a teacher in response to a question about collaborating and sharing practices.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Leaders make informed and effective organizational decisions across most aspects of the school and evaluate the effectiveness in supporting improvements in teaching and learning.
 - The administrative cabinet engages in on-going communication regarding the teaching and learning at the school. Informal and formal observations, conversations with teachers and coaches and the analysis and evaluation of student learning outcomes inform the organizational and instructional decisions. The cabinet has analyzed the middle school math data and determined that a significant number of students were not making one year's progress. The cabinet closely re-evaluated the math instructional program and organizational structures in place. To more precisely meet students' needs the math curriculum was revised, the schedule changed and instructional supports enriched.
 - Frequent analysis of relevant student learning outcomes prompts the continued discussions about teachers' strengths and needs. The decision to change some teacher assignments ensured that there was instructional strength at every grade level. As a result, teachers have more manageable classroom environments that has heightened student engagement and accelerated student learning.
- The school communicates high expectations to students and parents for attendance, learning and behavior that are supporting improved learning outcomes.
 - Very good collaboration has opened up lines of communication between and among teachers. Conversations around the use of rubrics have fostered opportunities for teachers to talk, listen to one another and implement best practice in the classroom. Additionally, members of all school's constituencies have created an environmental committee that meet and identify monthly thematic foci designed to heighten students' awareness of diversity and self-respect.
 - Administrators meet with middle school students monthly during town hall sessions. Academic and behavior issues are discussed and strategies provided which has led to reduced suspensions and behavior issues. One parent shared, "Kids were unsettled years ago. They now have respect for themselves, their teachers and other students." Another parent shared, "The principal nips problems in the bud!"
- A positive school tone, augmented by excellent external programs, supports the academic, social and personal growth of students and families.
 - The school celebrates students and families maintaining a culture of mutual trust and respect. Effective partnerships with community organizations have had positive results on increased parental involvement. Through the Reading Harvest program, an author is invited to the school to read with parents and students. This has resulted in students engaged in more recreational reading as evidenced by their

reading logs. “Bring your Dad to Work” day has promoted parent involvement. The United Black Men of Queens, consisting of doctors, lawyers, businessmen, policemen and firemen meet with boys each Saturday. Their involvement with students and families has helped families through difficult times.

- Students are provided multiple opportunities to receive additional help to address their specific learning needs. The school opens its library after school and on Saturdays and that provides students with additional support to finish projects as well as to receive homework help.
- Teachers participate in professional collaborations that foster evaluation and reflection as well as engage in opportunities to research effective instructional techniques.
 - Several teacher teams exist at the school providing opportunities for teachers to analyze students’ work, reflect on their instructional techniques, plan lessons together and engage in discourse about best practice. Through the excellent facilitation of the coaches, teachers discuss instructional strategies identified in the professional readings and commit to a timeframe for implementation of new learning. The impact of the sharing of teacher work has deepened teacher understanding of effective teaching strategies and has heightened their awareness of student needs. One teacher reported, “We have learned how to put new learning into practice. The coach is there to help and support us.”
 - The school encourages teachers to lead. Opportunities are provided for teachers to lead professional development workshops and/or chair school committees. This has had a positive impact as more teachers’ voices are heard as they share in the decision making process of the school.
- School leaders and faculty use a variety of tools to gather and analyze data on student learning outcomes to identify strengths and areas of need at the school level.
 - Analysis of summative and formative data found in ARIS, the Acuity Predictive assessments and end of unit tests, enables the school to identify most school-wide trends. When analysis confirmed that the academic needs of level 1 students were not being sufficiently met an intervention team was established and an action plan created which detailed targeted support to identified students. The impact of this precise intervention has accelerated student proficiency levels.
 - The school uses a data analysis protocol to analyze data adapted from the Oregon SEC Collaborative and based on *Using Data: Collaborative Inquiry for School Improvement*. The protocol enables teachers to remain focused on the task at hand during the course of meetings and has fostered the examination of student work in an unbiased way.
- The school uses classroom observations and analysis of student work to determine areas of instructional needs.
 - Classroom observations, analysis of student work and conversations with children, teachers and coaches inform the school's professional

development plan. Immediate feedback is provided to teachers; differentiated support planned.

- Structures are in place to help new teachers. Each new teacher is paired up with a mentor teacher who provides logistical support while the literacy and math coaches provide instructional advice and assistance.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen differentiation of instruction so that lessons engage students and tasks offer suitable challenge at their level, including effective questioning that elicits higher-order thinking and extends learning.
 - Whilst the school has embarked on a program to encourage teachers to employ a variety of instructional approaches to match individual students learning needs, lessons observed were not differentiated and did not sufficiently engage or challenge students. Tasks given to students were primarily from a workbook where students had to fill in answers. Questioning centered on common themes but did not sufficiently challenge all students to use higher order thinking skills.
- Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes using embedded assessments, both summative and formative, to identify trends and areas of need to suitably differentiate instruction.
 - The analysis of formative data is not rigorous enough to determine the progress of all subgroups and other identified students across all grades and subject areas. This prevents school leaders and faculty accurately identifying: trends, strengths and aspects of weakness requiring improvement, revising plans and implementing precise instructional supports.
- Establish measurable and differentiated learning goals for all subgroups and other identified students and groups of students and develop a transparent and shared system to rigorously monitor, measure and evaluate progress toward those goals so that adjustments can be made in a timely fashion.
 - The lack of established interim benchmarks across all grades and subject areas inhibits the evaluation of student progress against those benchmarks, contributing to the school's inability to revise and refine students' learning goals with precision. As a result, student needs are not sufficiently met preventing them from excelling at an accelerated pace.
- Provide consistent detailed feedback to students and families with reasons for their success and identify precise next steps for improvement based on specific rubrics detailing ways to achieve their goals.
 - Progress reports sent home to parents and families are inconsistent across the grades and subject areas. The lack of specificity for how students achieve the next learning goal significantly hampers success and the ability of parents to pinpoint ways to provide support.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Robert McNair School	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?		X		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?		X		
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			X	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?		X					
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?		X					
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X					
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X			
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?		X					
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed